

Training Exercise M—

Writing a Functional Description

To make an accurate disability determination involving a mental illness, the DDS needs proof of the link between an illness and a functional impairment. The key method a disability examiner has of obtaining this information is through a case manager. Therefore, the written descriptions of functional impairment a case manager provides are critical to the determination process.

This exercise allows you to practice the process of writing functional descriptions.

- Separate into pairs.
- Using information from the Functional Assessment worksheet, draft a functional description for one of the four functional areas. If necessary, use sample assessment answers provided on the following pages.
- Reconvene and share written functional descriptions with the larger group. Critique each pair's functional description, offering suggestions for making it more effective. Remember the goal is to link the diagnosis to functional impairment, as well as to write clearly and succinctly.

SAMPLE FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT RESPONSES

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

What do you know how to cook? When was the last time you were able to cook? What are your favorite foods to prepare?

Cook chicken, and french fries and corn.. Last cooked, let's see, maybe when I had my place about 4 years ago that was before I had trouble with the government, you know, but you know I can't talk about that.. I really like cooking. It's fun. My really favorite food to cook is oodles of noodles with chicken pieces because it's hot. I like to cook a lot in the microwave but I've never had one.

If you needed to shop for food to last a few days, would you need assistance or is that something you can tackle yourself? Do you usually have someone go with you to shop? Who? What assistance does he or she provide?

I've never done that, but I think I could. Lots of times though I just buy a soda and sandwich for the day. I don't have much money so I don't really shop and people don't like me in their stores. So sometimes when I go in their stores I pretend I'm someone else or get really quiet or get someone else to go in there for me because I don't want to cause any trouble but I don't understand why people are so mean and out to get me anyhow because I never did anything but maybe they don't like what I did to all their families when I was in DC working undercover. Ummm. I don't shop much. I don't have friends. I had a case manager once who helped me buy food. She was nice. She picked out stuff for me and told me what it was. I learned a lot. How about if you get her to help me again?



Are you able to use the telephone? When was the last time you were able to make a call?

I could use the phone but I don't like to because people listen in. I talk on the phone all the time but I make sure no one's listening in.

If you needed a phone number and didn't have it, how would you get it?

I'd call the operator if I needed help or stuff but sometimes they get so mad at you when you talk with them and want to hang up and that hurts my feelings and makes me mad because they have a job to do and they should do it and help people like me.

When you have your own place to live, what kind of housekeeping things do you do on a regular basis? What kind of chores do you find difficult to do?

It's been a really long time since I had my own place to live 'cause landlords always are mean to me and don't want to give me a nice place. So I lived in crummy places that I fixed up with curtains hanging around and papers and stuff. I don't believe in cleaning too much—you can get germs from cleaning and you can get them from other stuff so you have to be on the lookout. Vacuuming's hard. Don't like it. Sweeping is easier. It gets up the stuff pretty good.

About how often are you able to bathe or shower? Is this what's been your usual routine? Do you need any assistance doing this?

I go to the drop-in center to shower about once a week. A doctor told me once that too much bathing isn't good. He said your skin protects you from disease so having a little covering of dirt and oil is good for you. So I remember that. I like to wash up. It sometimes feels good but I'm careful to follow his advice. I can wash by myself—I don't want anybody looking at me. That's creepy.

Do you do your own laundry?

I don't have to. I just throw clothes away and get some at the Salvation Army where they have stuff for free. But you always have to smell it.

Have you ever been to the post office?

What for? To look at the criminals?

Budgeting is something we all struggle with. How are you at budgeting? Are you able to set up a budget and stick with it—or might that be something you could use assistance with? *If this applies:* When you have income, what usually happens to your spending habits? Do you, like some of us do, spend right away or are you able to make it last?

Well, I think I'm really good at it. One time I worked and I kept about \$3 for a long time. That's pretty good budgeting, don't you think? My dad said I didn't do it right, but I think he's wrong since he wasn't so good either at nothing. I maybe could use some help figuring out stuff at first but then I'm sure I could do it. When I get my welfare check now, shoot, it's about \$200 and I keep it for a whole week or two.

How do you usually get to places?

Well, I don't go too far. I walk 'cause I don't have money for the bus and besides I don't like riding the bus because there's so many people on it and they stare at you. Plus you have to sit next to them and that's yucky.



Social Functioning

Do you maintain contact with your family?

My family has abandoned me just because I don't have a place to live and because one time I told my sister she was crazy but she is because she says lots of weird stuff so they said they don't want to see me no more. Well did they ever think I don't want to see them? Well no but I guess I do but I can't want to since it's a lot of trouble for me.

How often do you go somewhere outside? Do you usually go by yourself or with other people? Do you prefer to be alone or with other people? Why?

Lots of times I sleep outside but like if you mean go out like to do stuff well I go to the soup kitchen but I like to eat by myself because other people ask me a lot of questions and I don't like that so sometimes I go to the shelter too but I try to get there really early and get a bed near the wall then I can be away from people if I had my own place—you gonna get one for me?—then I'd stay inside.

How often do you visit other people? Who do you usually visit? How often do other people come see you?

I can't think of no one to visit. I don't have friends—I used to ya know but not anymore because well they are different now so I don't see them and they don't see me.

Do you notice that you had friendships before that you don't have now? Do you have thoughts about that?

Yeah. I told you I had friends but they're different people now so when people are different you can't be friends with them don't you know what I mean I think you already asked me that.

Who do you see on a regular basis?

Nobody why should I?

What do you do if someone makes you really angry? How do you respond?

Depends a lot. Sometimes I go off...yell or hit 'em or something but sometimes I just holler and holler til they go away or sometimes I just stare at 'em and look through them and that's scares them so they stop.

Do you feel like you avoid being around other people?

Listen. People avoid me...I treat them good but they stare and follow me and do all kinds of stuff to me and I don't like it so why should I try to be nice....

Are you in any groups? Do you like being in groups?

No why should I? I'm not going to any groups. I hope you're not trying to start up that stuff with me 'cause I'm not going.

What kind of person would you say you get along best with? Who gives you the most difficulty?

If I find a person who helps me, I like that. Otherwise nobody's really any good...



Concentration, Persistence, and Pace

Have you noticed any changes in your ability to concentrate?

No I'm really good at concentrating. What did you say? Did you ask me something about my thinking? I'm a good thinker. What are you talking about?

Do you notice any changes in your memory? What do you notice? When do you notice this? Can you give me a specific example?

Yeah ever since I started walking around a lot I started forgetting stuff like I have to ask about meals at the soup places and the time and I often don't get there on time and I don't know why but it seems like sometimes because somebody told me the wrong time or I remembered it wrong or something then I forget where I put stuff which is really important since I hide things so other people won't steal them and then I can't find them so I figure they're stolen....

Would you describe yourself as someone who is easily distracted or do you find you can stay focused on a task if you need to?

What's distracted mean? I can do real good at stuff I don't know why you're asking me this stupid question but maybe it's because you wanted to know about my mother or something because that's how it goes. So ask me again....

What do you enjoy doing? What do you have an opportunity to do? When did you last do this? Are there any changes in what you enjoy now and what you used to enjoy?

I love swimming and bowling but I never did them really good or a lot. Sometimes I like to read stuff but it takes me a long time and I don't read as good anymore like I used to when I was in school. I like sports and sometimes I find someone to shoot baskets with but sometimes I don't.

Do you like to watch TV? If yes, what do you watch? Would you be able to watch an hour-long show and tell me about it shortly after you saw it?

Yeah but who gets to do that too much sometimes I watch. I used to watch a show where they had these guys who owned a big ranch and they were brothers but I don't remember any stories but that was like a few weeks ago when I saw it so I don't know.

What do you usually read? Do you do this often? Could you tell me what you just read if I asked you soon after?

Now sometimes I find story books like the kids read and those are fun or comics or sometimes big thick books but I usually just carry them around since they're heavy.



Repeated Episodes of Decompensation

When you worked before, how did you manage the demands of work—accomplishing the work on time, getting along with other people, etc.?

Well, it's pretty darn hard to get your work done and being in the warehouse is very big when people are talking at you and bugging you and asking for help and then when you help you're not supposed to so it's hard to know what to do. I tried working lots of times this year, but people always bugged me. One time I worked in a restaurant and everyone was always asking me stuff and I couldn't get the stuff done and the food got cold and I got hollered at and started arguing because they made me.

What would you do if you felt stressed at work? We all do sometimes feel stressed. What was it like for you? How did you manage stress? How do you manage it now?

Well you know stress is really terrible and eats at you and makes your head hurt and your belly hurt and makes you holler but now I don't holler but I did smoke pot but that's what you have to do when everyone puts so much on you. Working is the hardest thing in the world to do.

What would you do if you worked with someone you didn't like? What if this person were your boss?

Well if it was someone who'd bug me, I'd holler at them until they stopped. If someone was there but I could ignore them I just wouldn't answer any questions and pretend they weren't there. One time I had a boss who hollered and I hollered back and then he just kicked me out just like that without a chance.

What did you do if you had a question or work-related problem at work?

I'd try to figure it out and then if I couldn't I'd ask someone close to me but if they didn't know I'd just hope that it would go away and lots of times it did but sometimes over and over the question came up and I'd pretend an answer but it didn't work so I got laid off.

